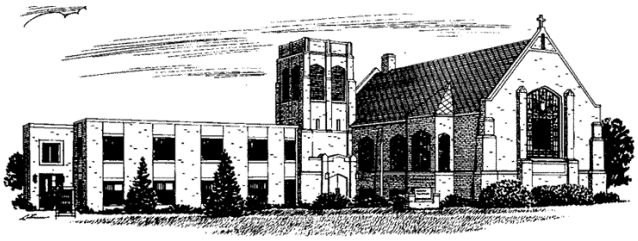
SARON NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, Michigan 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook: www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph



The Rev. Joan Oleson, Pastor
Home: 269-983-2475
Email: oleson@saronlutheran.org

Marcus Roll, Senior Choir Director,
Bell Choir Director
Email: roll1mc@gmail.com
Irma Gorman, Organist
Margaret Froehlich, Administrative
Assistant
Megan Savage, Financial Secretary
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org
Emily Gaul, Child Care

Typical Sunday Schedule at Saron:
During the School Year:
8:30 & 11:00 A.M. Worship
Childcare provided
9:40 Learning for Ages 2 – Adult

Summers (thru Labor Day weekend):
9:30 Holy Communion
Childcare provided
No Learning Hour

During the present Pandemic:
11:00 a.m. via Zoom

All are welcome!

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Dr. Craig Satterlee, Bishop of the
North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of Western MI

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia

Saron's Mission:
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!

In only a few weeks Lent begins. I always appreciate the liturgical actions that often accompany the season – especially the ashes on the forehead that typically happens on Ash Wednesday. Perhaps that reminder that we "are dust and to dust we shall return" is more evident than ever this year, even without the ashes. While many of these actions will not happen because of not meeting in person, I am looking forward to our mid-week worship opportunities which will happen on Zoom.

This year we will be looking at and listening to several African American spirituals at our mid-week services and learn something of their background and meaning. Some will likely be familiar and some less known. With Saron's deep love of music, I expect these times will enhance our devotional life even as they broaden our cultural understandings. I hope you will join me.

Lenten Worship
Ash Wednesday, February 17
Worship via Zoom 7 pm

Mid-Week Wednesdays
Feb 24, March 3, 10, 17, and 24
7 pm via Zoom

Theme: *Plenty Good Room*
In this devotional worship we will look at Scripture, American history, and the music and lyrics of six African American spirituals. They are "'Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit," "This Lonesome Valley," "Bow Down on Your Knees," "Plenty Good Room," "Ain't Dat Good News," and "Were You There?"

ANNUAL MEETING

Thank you to all who participated in Saron's annual meeting on January 24 and to Karen Johnson for her leadership. Since ballots will be counted on February 4, the newly elected council members will be announced at that time.

Caring and Sharing

In Our Prayers –

Arla Huelsberg and Richard Schalon are at the Whitcomb Tower Retirement Center, St. Joseph; **Bernice Koski** is at Woodland Terrace.

Office Hours at Saron (these hours will vary during Covid-19)

Margaret (secretary): Mon-Tues, 9 AM - 1 PM
Weds of Newsletter Week, 9 AM - 1 PM
Volunteers: Weds, 9:15 AM - 11 AM (approximately)
Megan Savage(financial secy); Tues & Thurs 5:30 PM
financial@saronlutheran.org

When Pastor is out of town, emergency pastoral care information can be obtained by calling the church office (983.1273) or contacting the president of the congregation.

Note: E-mails meant for Pastor should be addressed to oleson@saronlutheran.org. E-mails to Margaret and the church office should be addressed to info@saronlutheran.org.

Happy Anniversary Wishes to the following Members in February 2021.

Feb. 2 - Lindsay Gilmore-Gaspari
3 - Makayla Bradley
5 - Jerry Stelling
Erin Vollmer
6 - Linda Dipert
Mary Alice Brunner
8 - Ernst Knauf
Krystina Walker
9 – Frieda Williams
10 - Aiden Ashley
12 - Nathan Brown
15 - Robert King
21 - Ryan Talbert
22 - Darlene Kiessel
Hailey Talbert
26 - Wendy King

"God's Blessings for a very happy day and year round"

If there is anyone who has been omitted, or, if the dates are incorrect from the birthday and anniversary list, please call the church office at 983-1273. Thank you.

PRAYER GROUP

Please call or email Pastor Joan with your prayer requests at oleson@saronlutheran.org. Thank you.

Lots of chatter about vaccines lately, receiving them and scheduling them, and it's creating a sense of excitement in the air. We are starting to feel like we're *finally* on the last leg of this marathon. Even as we anticipate the glorious day we can gather together again, it's vital that we remember what we learned during our necessary time of social distancing. That will be a big theme this year for Fortify & Fly. How can we take our new hard-earned perspective and incorporate it into our worship service and space? Pandemic or not, people are always going to get sick, people travel for business and pleasure, people have mobility or transportation issues... Inclusion is more than *who* we welcome into our building and hearts, it's also *how* we include them. Where can wheelchairs be positioned and still feel integrated into the space? Is the Chancel accessible to all? Are we meeting the spiritual needs of our entire congregation, even the ones that can't be in the building? These are just a few of the questions that need to be carefully considered. This will be a long discussion and you will receive updates as we move into the early phases of the project. Remember that a year ago, you could not imagine a world where Saron would hold the annual meeting virtually. We did. People from across the country attended and it went off without a hitch. We owe it to ourselves and to each other to keep an open mind even after they smack that Band-Aid on our arm.

As of the end of December 2020, and the end of our 2nd year of Fortify & Fly, we had collected $311,516 towards our 3 year pledge total of $367,205. That puts us 84% of the way there in 67% of the timeframe! We can't wait to see where this year's giving will take us! Thank you for your continued generosity!

Worship

FACEBOOK

We love to share pictures of Saron's ministry on our Facebook page and we get great feedback. It is our practice not to put names with the pictures. If you have questions, or prefer your picture not to appear, please contact Pastor.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

Sun. Feb. 7 —
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Isaiah 40:21-31
Psalm 147:1-11, 20c
1 Corinthian 9:16-23
Mark 1:29-39

Sun. Feb. 14 —
Transfiguration of Our Lord
2 Kings 2:1-12
Psalm 50:1-6
2 Corinthians 4: 3-6
Mark 9:2-9

Sun. Feb. 21 —
First Sunday in Lent
Genesis 9:8-17
Psalm 25:1-10
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15

Sun. Feb. 28 —
Second Sunday in Lent
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:23-31
Roman 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38

Youth

Are you in grades 6-12? Please join us for youth group activities! For more info, contact Scott at *scottgaspari@outlook.com or (Cell) 847-373-8825.*

LEARNING

Saron is a congregation seeking to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered and sent by the Word.

Men's monthly Bible Devotions and Breakfast

Men's Bible Devotion will meet on February 6, at 9:00 a.m. by Via Zoom. Contact Dennis Lundgren for more information.

Tuesday Evening Men's Bible Study

Men's Bible Study will continue our study of ACTS through Tuesday, February 9, 2021. We will then not meet during Lent. Our Bible study will resume on Tuesday, April 6, 2021 (the Tuesday after Easter.) We will continue our Bible study of Acts at that time.

Saron's Tuesday Evening Men's Bible Study meets at 6:00pm on Tuesdays with Zoom.

As the Bible says "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

For more information call Bob Kynast at 269-921-2786 or Don Hafer at 269-985-3637.

Bob Kynast
bobkynast@gmail.com

1ST SUNDAY BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

On Sunday, February 14th, (note: second Sunday) we will meet at 6:30 p.m. to discuss two books embracing the same topic. "The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek", by Kim Richardson and "The Giver of Stars", by Jojo Moyes. Both are fictional accounts based on actual history about 1930's Kentucky and the women of the Pack Horse Library Project championed by Eleanor Roosevelt. Each has its own flavor and offers much to contemplate.

Coming March 7th is "When All Is Said", by Anne Griffin. Written by a woman through the voice of an 84-year-old man, this novel is a winner. {Amazon) "If you had to pick five people to sum up your life, who would they be? If you were to raise a toast to each of them, what would you say? And, what would you learn about yourself, when all is said?" Griffin's tender tale about the complexity of life will stay with you long "after all is said" and done.

Join us in this new year. Our gathering will be on Zoom and sign-on information will be sent to all of you who have expressed interest in our group. To be included on the list or if you have any questions, please contact Kathy Cowall (269-428-0354) or kcowall@hotmail.com. If you love to read and then share your thoughts, please come on February 14th. All are welcome!

"Today a reader. Tomorrow a leader."
(Margaret Fuller)

THURSDAY MORNING WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

We continue our study through Rob Bell's book, "What is the Bible?" We meet each Thursday morning at 9:30 via Zoom. Please contact Pastor if you would like Zoom info or need information about purchasing a book. This is a great time to invite someone who lives at a distance and can join us via the internet. There are times when we have participants from 5 different states. What a joy!

This is what Amazon has to say about the book:
Rob takes us deep into actual passages to reveal the humanity behind the Scriptures. You cannot get to the holy without going through the human, Rob tells us. When considering a passage, we shouldn't ask "Why did God say . . .?" To get to the heart of the Bible's meaning, we should be asking: "What's the story that's unfolding here and why did people find it important to tell it? What was it that moved them to record these words? What was happening in the world at that time? What does this passage/story/poem/verse/book tell us about how people understood who they were and who God was at that time?" In asking these questions, Rob goes beyond the one-dimensional question of "is it true?" to reveal the Bible's authentic transformative power.

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Have you ever wanted to read through the entire Bible in a year? Or do it again? You are invited to join Pastor Joan and others from Saron, and anyone else would like to join us, to do just that. Those interested will be given the list of Scripture to read for the month. There will be opportunity for discussion. Let Pastor know if you are interested and would like the readings sent to you. You can join anytime.

Women of the ELCA

Deborah Circle will meet by way of zoom on Wednesday, February 10, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. Linda Pater will lead the study which will be from Gather Magazine, January/February 2021 issue, session one. Zoom information will be emailed to everyone.

Hospitality

Watch for more news as we get closer to getting back together in the building.

Outreach

BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN

On December 24th 120 people enjoyed a sack lunch consisting of a turkey sandwich, chips, an apple, dessert & water. Our assemblers Christmas Eve were Mia Bradley, Preston Akers, Keith Stevens, and Dave & Kathie Bradley.

The Soup Kitchen is open 7 days a week, every day of the year. Hunger in our community is an ongoing concern. Thank you for supporting Saron in this outreach opportunity as a part of the ELCA's mission of *God's Gifts, Our Hands!*

Any questions or to volunteer please contact Kathie Bradley at 269- 921-4665.

After the self-quarantine **large cans of fruit are always needed at the Soup Kitchen** & can be dropped off anytime at the church. Any questions or to volunteer or provide cookies at a later date please contact Kathie Bradley at 269-921-4665.

Goats and piglets and chicks, oh my!

During Advent, the ELCA Good Gifts program offered us an opportunity to provide farm animals to needy families around the globe, farm animals that are so vital to the families' survival. And Saron responded! Because of your generosity, Saron is sending 14 goats, 8 piglets, 13 honeybee colonies, and 15 broods of chicks to thankful people around the world. The donations total $1,350. Thanks so much for your support this year!

As members of the ELCA, we believe that God is calling us into the world – together. And with generous, loving hands, we can make a difference.

From Saron Outreach folks

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

Thank you to all who are joining the conversations that will help in the discernment of becoming a more intentionally inclusive community of faith. These discussions are ongoing. They will help us discern the possibility of becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation. Watch for more gatherings to come! For now, mark your calendars for the following two opportunities, with details to come: Sunday, January 31, at NOON (Living Lutheran Video Clip, as well as an Asking Those Clunky Questions video and discussion) and Sunday, February 21, time and discussion topic, tbd. These times were chosen to give folks opportunity to join in and the Sunday morning learning hour does not work.

Also, if you do not have internet available, we encourage you to contact a member of the team with any of your questions/comments/wonderings.

For more information see the website at reconcilingworks.org or contact one of the task force members. Here is their contact information.

Laurel Gacek 269/470-6062
mlmg2445@sbcglobal.net
Laura Hicks 517/930-0579
lhicks42@gmail.com
Darlene Kiessel 269/313-4062
kiessel@me.com
Diane Madej (Open Hearts. Open Church, N/WLM Synod) 231/670-0328
dianemadej234@gmail.com
Pastor Joan Oleson 269/983-1273
oleson@saronlutheran.org

Here is Saron's proposed Welcome Statement, as affirmed by the council.

"As a community of faith who joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome."*

The Interfaith Action Group

The Interfaith Action Group has announced their next community book discussion which will take place via ZOOM on Thursday, March 18 at 6:00 pm. The book to be read is The Beauty of Your Face, by Sahara Mustafa. The author will be joining the group for the discussion.

The Beauty of Your Face, named one of the *New York Times's* 100 Notable Books of 2020, is a powerful novel about the life of Afaf Rahman, the daughter of Palestinian immigrants and the principal of a Muslim girls' school near Chicago. She faces loss, bigotry, and violence, but is redeemed by the universal powers of faith, family, and love. The novel is rich with details of the Islamic faith and Arab culture.

The link for registering and submitting questions is www. swmichinterfaith.org/upcoming-events.

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend their meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity. We hope this discussion will advance that goal by enriching our appreciation for our shared humanity.

Support

Tax Incentives during the Covid-19 Pandemic

"Above-the-line" tax deduction for charitable contributions

The federal government recently passed legislation to provide financial relief to families as a result of Covid-19. As part of the CARES Act, for the purpose of increasing the work of charitable organizations, individual taxpayers will receive new tax incentives for making charitable donations. The provision encourages individuals to contribute to religious, charitable, and educational organizations by creating a new "above-the-line" deduction (i.e. for taxpayers who take the standard deduction). This deduction permits deduction of up to $300 of annual monetary contributions.

This is applicable for tax years beginning after 2019, and does not sunset after 2020. A related provision increases the limitations on deductions for charitable contributions by individuals who do itemize. For those individuals, the 50% of adjusted gross income limitation is suspended for cash contributions made in 2020.
For members over 72 years old drawing income from an IRA, the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) is waived for 2020, thereby reducing your tax burden. Effective January 1, 2020, the CARES Act waived RMDs for defined contribution 401(k) plans, 403(b) plans, governmental 457(b) plans, and IRAs for calendar year 2020. The waiver applies to RMDs to be made in 2020 and to 2019 RMDs that were due by April 1, 2020 (if not already made in 2019). The good news is that Qualified Charitable Distributions can still be made directly from an IRA account to the church that will both benefit our ministry and reduce the member's taxable income.
As always, members are advised to check with their tax advisor for the latest information and interpretations before filing.

STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with TD Ameritrade, a brokerage firm, to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Joe Ulrey to receive more information. Thanks! Joe Ulrey josephulrey@yahoo.com

LIVING LUTHERAN RENEWALS

It's time to submit your "Living Lutheran" subscription renewal. The cost is $9.00. Please send your check with the memo (or a note) marked "The Lutheran" by February 15. Living Lutheran is the magazine of the ELCA and has lots of feature stories about ministry around the country, as well as ELCA news. Subscribing through Saron provides a significant cost reduction than the cost of individual subscriptions, while still delivered to individual homes.

New Carpet Has Been Installed!

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
510 MAIN STREET
ST. JOSEPH, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email:info@saronlutheran.org

A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

February 2021

February 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 11:00 a.m. Prayer Time (in homes)	**2** 6:00 p.m. Men's Bible Study Via Zoom	**3** 11:00 a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom	**4** 9:30 a.m. Bible Study Via Zoom	**5**	6 9:00 a.m. Men's Bible Devotion Meeting Via Zoom
7 Worship at 11:00 am Via Zoom Confirmation 9:30 & Sunday School 10:10 Via Zoom	**8**11:00 a.m Prayer Time (in homes) 6:00 p.m. Support Comm. Via Zoom Newsletter Articles due	**9** 6:00 p.m. Men's Bible Study Via Zoom	**10** 11:00 a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom	**11** 9:30 a.m. Bible Study Via Zoom	**12**	13
14 Worship at 11:00 am Via Zoom Confirmation 9:30 Via Zoom	**15**11:00a.mPrayer Time (in homes) 7:00 p.m. Church Council Meeting by Via Zoom	**16**	**17** **Ash Wednesday** 11:00 a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom 7:00 p.m. Worship	**18**	**19**	20
21 Worship at 11:00 am Via Zoom Confirmation 9:30 Via Zoom	**22** 11:00 a.m. Prayer Time (in homes)	**23**	**24** 11:00 a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom 7:00 p.m. Worship Via Zoom	**25**	**26**	27
28 Worship at 11:00 am Via Zoom Confirmation 9:30 Via Zoom		**IF YOU ARE NOT** **PASTOR JOAN**	**RECEIVING ZOOM** **AT oleson@**	**INVITATIONS AND** **saronlutheran.org**	**WOULD LIKE**	**TO, PLEASE CONTACT**